

**Testimony of Leif Mitchell**  
**Appropriations Committee, February 20, 2009**

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Leif Mitchell and I am the co-chair of the AIDS LIFE Campaign - Connecticut's only statewide AIDS advocacy coalition.

**I am testifying to urge you to restore the proposed \$2.5 million cut to the AIDS Services line in the Department of Public Health (DPH) budget.**

The Governor's budget calls for slashing AIDS services by \$2.5 million leaving many of the 10,860 People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Connecticut without access to doctor's visits, medications, meals, housing, dental care, transportation, mental health and substance use treatment, utility assistance, and insurance co-pays.

This amounts to a 40% cut to DPH's AIDS services line. We were willing to suffer a 10% cut in light of the current recession, however, why should PLWHA – one of the most vulnerable populations in our state – have to disproportionately share the burden of this budget crisis?

**This cut will result in**

- 1. A loss of over 30 Connecticut jobs, and**
- 2. Pre-2000 funding levels for AIDS services.**

You have heard DPH report that the number of *newly identified and reported* cases of HIV/AIDS has declined over the past few years. While this is true, what you may not know is that **the total number of PLWHA – approximately 18,000 – continues to rise and is at an all time high!** That's more people needing more AIDS Services.

I'd like to offer a little background on this very confusing situation:

- In 2007, CT lost \$3.3 million of federal Ryan White funding due to changes in the distribution formula. The funding is now based on the number of living HIV *and* AIDS cases when it was previously only based on living AIDS cases. CT lost this funding because DPH did not have a mature HIV registry.
- We thank you for adding \$2.5 million per year for two years to the AIDS Services budget to make up for this devastating loss. We know that the legislature does not like to supplant lost federal dollars, and we appreciate that you took this life saving step for PLWHA.
- In 2008, the federal government took a one time action to reduce the impact of the federal cuts by allocating \$1.6 million to CT. That funding ends on February 28, 2009.

**This year's federal funding will not restore the \$3.3 million that was lost in 2007.**

Therefore, it is crucial that the \$2.5 million remain in the AIDS Services line in the DPH budget. PLWHA in our state are counting on you. Will you be there to support them?

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